

REINCARNATION IN THE LIGHT OF CHRISTIANITY

An enquiry often put to us is, How does the Christian mystic regard the doctrine of Reincarnation, which only in recent years has been introduced to us in the West and accorded great prominence and importance in certain quarters? Does he accept it or not? And since it has had no place in Christian teaching, what is the truth about it?

Even among professedly Christian minds there have been differences of belief upon this, so that one can speak only for oneself. However, among those accepting the doctrine there obtain different views as to the nature and method of reincarnation, some holding that the individualised Ego-unit becomes re-embodied in its entirety, and others that it projects only fragmentary portions or rays of itself into physical conditions. Both views and both processes may be true; we know too little of the laws governing the physical manifestation of life to dogmatise upon them, and must be prepared to find general uniformity of principle characterised by infinite variety of method.

But whatever be the truth about Reincarnation, the Christian mystic, if an actual and not a *soi-disant* mystic, may well say of it, for reasons that will appear presently, "Save as a matter of intellectual curiosity, I am not concerned with this problem at all. It pertains not to the world of reality and permanence, but to that of time, flux, and transiency. It does not interest me or influence my thought or conduct. Be the truth of the matter what it may, what alone interests me is to identify myself, my will, my purpose, my life, with

the Divine will, purpose, and life; to become what they will, to go or come where they send or draw me, to live where, and in such form or body, as they bid or need me." Moreover, not only is the Christ-teaching passive upon the subject of reincarnation; it points with great insistency in another direction so inconsistent with it as to forbid our building upon it. It does not deny reincarnation as a fact of nature; on the contrary, it may be taken as presupposing that fact. But its whole trend is towards ensuring such a change in, and development of, the individual incarnated soul that reincarnation in physical conditions shall no longer be its portion. Life in physical conditions necessarily emphasises that very sense of individualism, egoity, and separateness which of all things it is desirable to slay and die to. "Whoso loseth his life (the sense and the fact of separate existence) shall save it." "Whoso hates not his own life (by obliterating the idea of existence apart from Me) cannot be My disciple." One cannot therefore concentrate attention upon and attach value to the future destiny of his personality, and at the same time abandon that personality to an ideal which promises to transfigure and elevate it to a totally new and loftier order of being. In a word the position would seem to be this: the integration of the soul in Christ ensures its immunity from reincarnation; whilst, conversely, reincarnation is the menace and the penalty of failure to attain that goal.

As a fact susceptible of scientific demonstration reincarnation is incapable either of proof or disproof. Such evidence of it as exists is but circumstantial and tending to a probability. Whether the dogma should be accepted depends, therefore, upon our being satisfied of it as representing a fact, or as being at least a reasonable hypothesis. To many it is repellent, and, as shall be shown, there is good reason for its being so, even though one's judgment be constrained to accept it. But neither attraction to nor repulsion by the idea will determine its truth; facts must be faced and accepted independently of our prejudices and beliefs.

If we care to accept—what it is imprudent to ignore—the authority of the past, we find the Scriptures and traditions of Oriental races with a great spiritual and philosophic past emphatic in their inculcation of the doctrine. So, too, are the Pythagorean and Platonist systems. In fact, says Max Müller, “it is well-known that this dogma has been accepted by the greatest philosophers of all ages.”¹ Outside the Greek philosophical and mystical schools the European mind has been unacquainted with it. But nothing hangs upon the ignorance of it by the peoples of a continent whose civilisation is of quite recent growth and whose populace was barbarian long after Egypt and the Far and Middle East has declined from their high positions as centres of religious and philosophic wisdom. The history of civilised Europe synchronises virtually with that of the Christian Church, which has held (or withheld) the keys of information upon arcane matters, and since that Church was silent upon reincarnation, no means existed by which the idea could be propagated in the West until it became introduced by the “Theosophical” movement of our own day. Its acceptance was then facilitated by two causes; first, by the translation and popularisation among us of the sacred and philosophic literature of the East, where the doctrine is universal; and secondly, by the recognition by Western science of an evolutionary process at work in Nature, a process suggesting that all life advances by gradations and through a succession of ascending morphological changes. Even the official orthodoxist at last admits² that the doctrine of successive rebirths is “attractive.” The mind can hardly be otherwise than gratified at observing a gradual perfecting process involving a sequence of births and deaths, and at contemplating life sleeping in the mineral, dreaming in the plant, waking in the animal, attaining self-consciousness and freedom of action in man, with the added prospect of further spiritualisation and advancement as time goes on. What the mystical mind of the East has intuitively discerned and ever held as true,

¹ *Three Lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 93.

² Dean Inge, *Philosophy of Plotinus*, ii. 30.

the practical intellect of the West has at last hit upon by scientific inductive research, the results of which suggest that all life advances to more and more perfect consciousness, by slow patient gradation and through countless modes and forms,

Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope through darkness up to God.

That is surely a noble joy of soul which, upon imaginatively surveying our past and our future possibilities, exclaims with Walt Whitman:

Births have brought us richness and variety,
And other births will bring us richness and variety.

I am an acme of things accomplished, and I an encloser of
things to be.

My feet strike an apex of the apices of the stairs;
On every step bunches of ages, and larger bunches between the
steps.

All below duly travell'd, and still I mount and mount.

Afar down I see the first huge nothing. I know I was even there.
I waited unseen and always, and slept through the lethargic mist,
And took my time, and took no hurt from the fetid carbon.
Long was I hugg'd close and long.

Immense have been the preparations for me,
Faithful and friendly the arms that have helped me.
Cycles ferried my cradle. . . .
For room to me stars kept aside in their own rings,
They sent influences to look after what was to hold me.

Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me,
My embryo has never been torpid; nothing could overlay it.
For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,
Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and deposited
it with care.

All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me,
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.

And anyone sharing the belief expressed in these lines will be able to interpret in a much wider sense than is usual, and to utter with much deeper feeling

than he who views human life as restricted to a single physical existence, the old words of thanksgiving, "We bless Thee for our creation, preservation (through all our past modes of existence), and all the blessings of *this* life."

At least a plausible *prima facie* case for reincarnation can be made out from external observation and probability. The doctrine offers, too, a satisfying explanation of much that is inexplicable without this hypothesis. It elucidates the problem confronting us in the inequalities present in the order of human nature. For if we are obliged to regard our individual present condition and position as the result of what we have in the past made them, and as the nett product of a world-long life-sum in addition and subtraction, we cannot complain if they fall below what we should wish them to be; a thought which should stimulate us to improve ourselves for the future, whilst it permits us also to regard life in physical conditions as but the temporary projection of a larger deathless soul or self of us, dwelling permanently upon a higher plane of being than this, but requiring periodical contact with the sense-world for educative purposes.

Further, a strong argument for reincarnation is to be found in the periodic pulsations characterising Nature on all her modes and activities. Outbreathing and indrawing, systole and diastole, flow and ebb, light and darkness: is human life alone an exception to the universal rhythm? Daily we wake to activity, and nightly are withdrawn into sleep; alternating throughout our lives between objective and subjective conditions. Are birth and death other than wakings and sleepings upon a greater scale; and are not all our wakings and sleepings, and all our births and deaths, but the overtones of a fundamental rhythm of manifestation and *pralaya* originating in the mighty heart-beats of the Lord of life?

Some evidence, too, though of a less demonstrable kind, comes from our subjective nature. Flashes of reminiscence, and intuitive recognition of places or people one has previously been associated with, said

to be a common feature in the East, are not infrequent experiences even among ourselves, and suggest, as their source and cause, the ingathered, stored-up memories of the soul filtering occasionally into the normal consciousness. It may well be, as Wordsworth wrote, that "our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting," and that "not in entire forgetfulness" of antecedent earth-experience do we revisit the physical world. In the depths of us we are conscious of things we can never explain or demonstrate to others. *Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas.*

Indeed to accumulate the evidence no farther, the hypothesis of reincarnation appeals to the reason and understanding as true to probability. It offers a view of human life satisfying our sense of justice and order. The only alternative to it is the unsatisfactory one of conventional orthodoxy, that each soul is a special creation brought into and departing from this world once only; and that though then born, not of God, but at the will (and often the casual, irresponsible lust) of the flesh and blood of more or less semi-animal parents, an eternity of unearned bliss or of unmerited misery depends upon its benighted behaviour during the brief spasm of its single incarnate existence.

The objection that we are unconscious of prior incarnations is easily disposed of, and is based upon ignorance of the constitution of the human organism. Those who raise it overlook that it is the soul, the vehicle of the ultimate Ego or spirit of man, which incarnates and takes on body and personality, and that, therefore, the memory of past experiences must reside not in the superficial, temporal brain-consciousness of the latter, but in the psychic deeps of the persisting soul, the faculties of which are almost wholly muffled and atrophied by the grossness of the material vesture encasing it. Man's outer body, including his natural mind and personality, is but so much organised and temporarily vitalised dust and ashes contributed by Mother Nature, and magnetically polarised and woven by her into a vehicle enabling his soul to enter into relations with the external world. It is no more the

soul itself than are the clothes one daily dons and doffs. Not therefore in the physical brain can reside memories of the past career of the undying soul, though the brain-consciousness may in some circumstances become lit up with and reflect the deeper memories flashed into it by the soul itself. But since most people never "possess their soul" at all, but imagine their temporal personality and its mechanical "carnal mind" to represent their total nature, they are self-excluded from realising the concealed contents of their hidden being. "Man, know thyself" is the password and condition of all hidden wisdom. Whatever we know of our outer nature, we are condemned, it seems, to ignorance of our *soul* until we have earned the right to gaze within its fleshly veils and have amassed sufficient moral strength and emotional stability to bear the sight of what will then be disclosed to us. Indeed the condemnation is a merciful concession to our present frailty, for no unpurified, unprepared man could behold the spectacle of his own unregenerate soul and preserve his reason. As with Bluebeard's wife (originally, I suspect, an allegory, like so many legends and children's tales, of interior truth) there is one chamber of our house of life into which we are forbidden to look till the proper time comes, and the door of which if opened would reveal past alliances that would terrify us to be reminded of. The wise ancients tell us of the Lethe-draughts administered to the soul before entering this life and upon quitting it, and we shall do well to appreciate their myth.

Turning now to the authority of our own Scriptures, the light thrown upon the subject is at first sight small and perhaps of doubtful value. Modern advocates of the doctrine, ready to clutch at any new Oriental idea, but little willing to abide by their own old authorities, seem hard put to it to establish their claim by appealing to biblical lore. They are usually content with pointing to Solomon's words (Wisdom viii. 20) that "being good, I came into a body undefiled"; to the case of the man born blind, of whom the Lord was asked whether the infirmity was due to his own past

fault or to that of his parents; to the passages as to the Baptist being a rebirth of Elias; and to the text in Rev. iii. 12 as to the perfected soul becoming a pillar in the heavenly house and "going out no more," *i.e.* into earthly form. But did they know their Bible, a much stronger case for reincarnation can be made out from other passages the implications of which are not discerned by the average reader. The clergyman who would warmly dissociate himself from so heterodox a doctrine as that of successive births and deaths is unaware that he emphatically affirms it every time he reads the Psalm in the burial service, "Lord, thou hast been our refuge from *one generation to another*.¹ . . . Thou turnest man to destruction; again, Thou sayest, *Come again*, ye children of men." And, as will appear presently, our Lord makes frequent references to it in the Gospels.

But now, granting all this, and assuming ourselves to be satisfied that reincarnation is a fact of life, what has Christian doctrine to say about that fact; and why has it not hitherto been recognised and proclaimed?

To deal with the latter point first, there are very good reasons and sound grounds why the Christian Church has been dumb upon the subject. During European history the clergy could not of course teach that of which they were ignorant. But the early Church was *not* in ignorance about it. It is incredible to suppose that the fact of reincarnation was unknown to those among whom the Christian religion originated, for Christian origins are traceable to the very sources where the doctrine was axiomatic, whilst some of the earliest patristic writings also testify to acquaintance with it. The scanty direct reference to it in Scripture proves nothing, for we know that side by side with the written oracles was given an interpretative, supplemental, oral teaching, and that neither the written word nor the

¹ Literally "from generation to generation." The Hebrew word *Dor* signifies not generations of "descendants," but successive rounds or periods of existence; "comings in and goings out" of the soul in respect of physical existence; incarnations.

expository instruction was put to indiscriminate public use, but was reserved for inner circles of disciples dedicated to the religious life and to special study of spiritual science, among whom the doctrine may be taken for granted as familiar. The truth of the matter seems to me to be that the early Church had a deliberate motive, not in concealing, but in refraining from mentioning it, and that as the Church gradually became materialised and formal, this non-mention relapsed first into non-knowledge of the doctrine and ultimately into complete repudiation of it. It would seem that even in the East, where the doctrine is so generally held, it was never emphasised as a hope by spiritual teachers, but having passed into public knowledge it assumed the same undue prominence which has been given it among ourselves by certain modern teachers.

What was the motive for this non-reference by the Church to reincarnation? Briefly this. The Christian Evangel was one designed to offer means of *liberation* from the wheel of birth; it was one providing the means of *escape* from the prospect of otherwise interminable incarnations in the flesh; it was the charter guaranteeing the soul's final and permanent exodus from this land of its bondage. Once grasp this fact and it will be clear why Christian doctrine strove to divert attention from, rather than to direct it towards, reincarnation. It viewed incarnation in the mortal body as the sign of the soul's defection and alienation from its source. It sought to teach that the soul's aim should be as rapidly as possible to escape from the world of generation by attaining *regeneration* in Christ, so transcending and passing for ever away from a condition of existence into which, strictly, it ought never to have entered at all.

Remember this. The Hebrew-Christian system and Scriptures hinge entirely upon the postulate that man is a fallen being; fallen away from his original status and from the true order of life appointed for him; and fallen not in accordance with an orderly evolutionary process destined to right itself mechanically in due time, but fallen as the result of deliberate perverse exercise of his will and conscious violation of the law of his

nature. They inculcate that man passed out of his Creator's hands in a condition described as "very good," and that in virtue of that qualification he was appointed to "have dominion over" this planet and its creatures, to superintend its development, and control the operation of the laws and forces to which it was subject, himself as a superior being remaining subject to a still higher order of law applicable to his own lofty nature. But from this "very good" condition it is obvious that he has somehow now become the very reverse, and that from his original position of control he has become displaced, with the result that instead of continuing to "have dominion over" a subordinate world, that subordinate world now dominates *him*. Instead of "being lord of creation" and driving the planetary coach-and-four, he is now beneath the wheels of that cumbrous vehicle and being dragged along by its runaway horses. His original radiant ethereality of body has become atrophied; his heavenly consciousness eclipsed; in their place he wears a body of such gross matter that it is called "the grave of the soul," and he is normally conscious only in virtue of so limited, inferior, and unreliable a faculty as the "carnal mind." The consequences of his fall were not merely personal; they extended to and disordered not merely this planet and its creatural life; they threw out of gear the mechanism of a vast cosmic system of which this world was not only an integral part, but a pivotal point. Moreover, "Adam," the generic name of the race which fell, originally functioned in solidarity, as a harmonious whole, a synthetic unity of beings. By the Fall that unity of being and action became destroyed. From being the one Word of Life which he was, and which as the Divine vice-regent he spoke, over this lower world, he became dispersed into a Babel of strange tongues, a multiplicity of impotent words. As a dropped glass mirror becomes shattered into numberless, shapeless, useless, angular fragments, so the homogeneous Adamic race-soul has become shivered by its fall into millions of splinters, each still preserving its original divine properties, each still capable of being

a tiny mirror to reflect God, yet each obscured and soiled by the mire into which it has crashed, and encrusted with the body of organised mud-particles it has accreted around it.

One consequence of this degenerate, disunited condition is inability to bear the strain and fatigue of existence without periodic relief. Hence daily activity entails nightly rest, while the total span of our years in objective conditions involves the longer, deeper sleep of bodily death and an appropriate period of recuperation in a subjective state; in both cases the process being indefinitely repeated. But neither sleep nor his brother death has any place in a House of *Life*. From such a House man fell; to such a House will he return when he retrieves his fall; a House of which it is written that "the gates are not shut at all by day, and there is no night there." The believer in reincarnation who, by reason of his belief, prides himself upon holding advanced ideas, should therefore reflect that to be incarnate at all is the badge of frailty and degradation, the mark and portion of a fallen, disordered soul. Instead of being something to boast about, the physical body (as at present imperfectly constituted) and all that pertains to it is something of which it is eminently desirable to become rid. A humbler and more deeply seeing soul would feel rather with the youthful Plotinus, whose spiritual sensitiveness was so acute that he was "ashamed that his soul had need to be in body at all." The repugnance most of us feel to the doctrine (like the shame felt at physical nakedness) is at bottom due to a deep inner consciousness that our present condition and embodiment are really *unnatural* and alien to the soul.

Recognising and basing itself upon these premises, then, the Catholic faith next proceeds to declare that means have mercifully been devised to retrieve these unhappy conditions and to restore the fallen race and perishing planet, which without superior help could never recover their primal condition, but would continue to lapse into increasing degeneracy until ultimate annihilation (or rather decomposition) was reached. The means of restoration provided are briefly and

perhaps best expressed in the words, "God so loved the world¹ that He gave His only begotten Son that all who believed in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

It follows, then, that the Fall and the Incarnation hang indissolubly together. Reject the one, there is no need to accept the other. If the former be not a fact, to what purpose the latter? If man's present condition (despite all its imperfections) be normal and as it should be, if it be as it was divinely ordained to be, if it be but a temporary inevitable phase of a process in the course of which we shall mechanically pass through imperfection to perfection, why a Divine sacrifice to accelerate or interfere with what was already in process of self-accomplishment?

The Saviour "took upon Him to deliver man." From what? From bondage to all the forces now chaining him to existence in conditions in which he was never intended to live; to release him from the wheel of successive physical births and deaths. By the Fall into matter the human soul had become magnetised to matter, more and more drawn into and enslaved by the powerful centripetal pull of the forces whose manifested form is the swirling flux of external Nature. From this that soul needed to be de-magnetised, to be polarised anew to the more powerful lodestone of another and supernatural order of life. "I, if lifted up, will (magnetically) draw all men unto Me." He, therefore, introduced and incorporated His own heavenly Substantiality (Body) and Spirit or Life-essence (Blood) into the disorganised corruptible stuff, physical and astral, now environing and composing us; thereby as it were inoculating them with a powerful anti-toxin designed to set up a contrary fermentation in the fabric of all external Nature, including the human family.

¹ By "the world" is not meant merely our earth, as is suggested by our feeble English term and translation. In the Greek the word used is *Kosmos*, which means something much more magnificent, implying the entire created universe and system of worlds visible and invisible, working in perfect beauty, symmetry, and order. It was this harmony and order (which the Fall destroyed and threw out of gear), no less than the fallen race, which "God so loved" and designed to repair.

This influx of regenerative Divine energy is at the free disposal of us all; it can be appropriated by whosoever wills to absorb it into himself until it re-creates and transmutes his nature. In biblical metaphor that appropriation is spoken of in terms of eating; for food conforms the eater to itself; one becomes what one habitually eats, whether with the body or with the mind. Accordingly the Lord's words, in giving His twofold Life-substance to fallen man, may be paraphrased thus: "Eat ye *all* of this, which is given and shed for you for the remission, reversal, and ultimate neutralisation of the adverse evil forces you now labour under. Eat this regenerative unifying food—albeit in faith, for in your present clouded state it must needs be supernatural and impalpable to you—with your whole force of will, imagination, and desire, and in precisely the same way as you have already eaten, and are still eating, that apple¹ of discord and multiplicity which has brought you to your present pass, but with opposite and counter-acting results. Eat it until its transmutative action, working first upon the finer and then upon the coarser fibres of your being, gradually revolutionises and recreates your present constitution, redeeming it from the magnetic attraction now enslaving it, lifting it beyond the flux of birth and death to which all temporal existence is subject, and preserving your body and soul unto the everlasting Life of which I am the revealed representative."

It is now, I hope, clear why Christian doctrine has been dumb upon the subject of reincarnation. Its design was to lift our eyes to the hills whence came the promise of liberation from it; not to keep them lowered to the ground where external natural forces hold the soul fast in their machinery until means of release therefrom are brought to it. Never, until later

¹ Apple, *i.e.* pomegranate, the numerous seeds of which are the symbol of division and multiplicity when separated, yet are kept unified within the containing rind. With the apple of Genesis compare the Golden Apples of the Hesperides, guarded and reserved only for regenerate souls, and note that the Latin word for "apple" and "evil" is the same (*malum*).

times of ignorance, did Christian doctrine *deny* the fact of reincarnation; it simply left it alone, directing attention to a larger hope, a loftier subject of contemplation. Far from making no allusion to it, the Gospels abound in passages implying it and interpretable only by reference to it. Moreover, they contain instruction of high importance bearing upon it; they warn us clearly that "times (cycles, time-periods) and seasons" are allocated for the accomplishment of cosmic purposes, and that a definite time-limit is set to the reincarnatory process; so that if, when the cosmic clock strikes a certain appointed hour, the soul has not then availed itself of the means provided for its redemption, the door of further advancement will become inevitably and automatically closed upon it and it will remain enforcedly cut off from the main current of life-progress and left behind in what is described as "outer darkness."

"Little children," wrote a great spiritual Father and seer to his disciples nineteen centuries ago, "it is the last time" (1 John ii. 18); that is, we are living in the closing years, the last lap, of a world-cycle and world-order which is rapidly approaching its end and destined to give place to another "time" of a new, higher, and different character. In view of recent events and present conditions, who does not recognise the force of these words to-day? Every thinking mind realises, every sensitive conscience feels, that we are coming to the end of an age, that the old order of things is rapidly going down hill with ever-increasing momentum. We are not now concerned with pursuing this theme, except in so far as the subject of "times" bears upon the question of reincarnation. And in this respect, to build upon the prospect of future re-embodiment, as providing opportunity to make good in a subsequent physical existence the spiritual advancement one is neglecting in the present, involves the peril that should a change of "times" and world-order intervene before one's deferred intentions are fulfilled, the future may involve a destiny of a very different kind from that upon which one counts. Then, instead of being, as some seem to think it, a "fresh chance," their rebirth

may prove to be a penalty, a sentence of exclusion from progress, through neglect of past opportunity.

Nor should we rely, as so many also do, upon *after-death* chances of progress. By passing from the objective to the subjective side of existence in this planet, we do not necessarily leave or get rid of this world, but only of one aspect of it; unless then fitted to pass entirely out of its principle and magnetic radius we shall still remain its thralls and subject to its attractive force, and be, moreover, even worse off than we are now through being deprived of part of the equipment—the physical organism—requisite as the resistant fulcrum for facilitating our soul's progress. Consider this momentous phrase in the Psalms: "Let every godly man make his prayer unto Thee (*i.e.* let him energise away from the material and towards the spiritual principle) in a time (or world-period) when Thou mayest be found (literally, in a time of finding); in the flood of great waters (or submergence in subjective astral conditions) they shall not reach him" (Ps. xxxii. 6).

The whole implication of the Scriptures and of Christian doctrine is that if we fail in appropriating the means available for escaping rebirth, we are in peril of relapse into it; their whole emphasis is thrown upon announcing that "*now* is the accepted time; now is the day of (appropriated to) salvation" from it, missing which we must take the consequences. Hitherto we have doubtless come into incarnation countless times, as, since the great fall into materialism, we have struggled or been mercifully helped upwards from lower to higher bodily forms and from less to more advanced degrees of consciousness, until, in Whitman's words, "here at last I stand with my robust soul." But we have done so as the blind helpless sport of Nature's mechanism and Nature's law, and in the course of world-cycles allowed and allotted for that purpose. But, with the Christ-advent, the "time"—the "last time"—came when this permissiveness, this concession to our impotence, terminated, and the responsibility of our further progress was thrown upon ourselves. "There is verily a dis-

annulling of the previous commandment owing to the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law (of natural evolution) made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by the which we draw nigh unto God" (Heb. vii. 18-19). In a word, "the times of our ignorance God winked at"; but, in the times of our enlightenment by the incarnate Light of the World, we have no excuse if we choose to continue in Egyptian bondage and darkness.

At the conclusion of a "time" or world-epoch occurs a stocktaking of souls, a sifting of wheat from tares, a "judging (or separating) the quick and the dead." At such a juncture the formula applies: "To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." The spiritually vitalised, being then sufficiently demagnetised from earth-attraction and carnality to become polarised to and integrated in the Christ-kingdom, will be drawn within that kingdom and their further growth stimulated by the current of Divine life infused into the new cycle. But the same current will have precisely the opposite effect upon the spiritually dead and incapable of assimilation to it; it will say, "Begone, I never knew you." That current of Divine magnetism will either attract or repel, either integrate or disintegrate, the material presented to it. Like will be drawn to like, and the incompatible be driven but the farther apart. What, by feeding upon the Divine substantiality, has then already acquired such a Petrine rock-like consolidation of being that something further can be built upon it, and against which the gates and processes of the astral world (which include the process of rebirth) cannot prevail, will become incorporated into the Christ-kingdom; what then possesses only the consistency of psychic shoddy will be liable to be "ground into powder," to dissipation into the cosmic ether—the raw material of Nature's activities. Do we not already see the process at work in to-day's disintegration of the old order of things and the appalling amount of human lunacy?

We are prone to be unwisely sentimental about the

Divine *mercy* and to shut our eyes to its indissociable complement, the *severity* of Divine law, as though the former would or could act apart from the other. Our Lord and the Gospels allow no such comfortable compromising with ourselves. Let us consider three references to our subject, in the light of which reincarnation should be considered.

First, there is the prophetic parable of the wise and foolish virgins (*i.e.* souls), intimating the destiny of those who, at the close of the age, have and have not "oil in their lamps." ("Oil," a heat and light-giving substance in liquid form, is a figure of spirit (the Divine principle of mingled Fire and Light) in combination with astral "water" or ethereal psychic matter; "lamps" are, of course, the body or vehicle appointed to contain that oil.)

Secondly, there is the very striking and important passage (Matt. v. 25-26; Luke xii. 58-59, R.V.) concluding "How is it ye know not how to interpret *this time*? For as (since) thou art going with thine adversary before the magistrate, on the way give diligence to *be quit of him*, lest he hale thee to the judge, who shall deliver thee to the officer, who shall cast thee into prison; thou shalt by no means come out thence till thou hast paid the very last mite." The meaning is this: "You and all the seen and unseen hostile forces (the 'adversary') with which you in your present terrestrial condition have to wrestle, are rapidly moving towards a period of cosmic convulsion when the present world-order will come to a stop and be readjusted. Everything and everyone will then pass beneath the scrutiny of Christ, the Divine Magistrate, to whom is committed all power in heaven and earth over this age (not at any formal tribunal-bar, but by a subtle unobserved process, which will determine what comes or fails to come up to His required standard), and who will separate what is worth preserving from what is not. Be diligent, therefore, to disentangle yourselves as speedily as possible from every thing or desire that makes and keeps you earthbound, and that even after you have lost your physical form may still suck your soul back

into the vortex of physical embodiment. For those not then quit of those adverse magnetic forces, and therefore unable and unqualified to advance where those forces do not rule, will be automatically excluded from the forward movement that will then set in; they will be left behind to the executive action of the natural law governing your world, and eventually pass to a certain 'prison' beyond the bounds of redemptive grace for the time being and from which there will be no escape until that law has fulfilled itself upon them to the utmost."

The "prison" (*phulake*) referred to is that spoken of (in 1 Pet. iii. 19) in the phrase "spirits in prison," to whom our Lord ministered in the interval between His death and resurrection. It is the astral plane of this earth; a psychic lock-up or place of custody for souls still earthbound, unprogressed or incriminated. It is well not to think of it as the "next world"; for it is part of *this* world, an extension of it constituted of less gross, more fluidic, and inchoate matter; the "summer land" of the spiritualists. It is the unmanifested subjective complement to the manifested objective side of our planet; and, as we know, the Lord's human ministry extended to both these divisions of our world, for both of them needed His redemptive cleansing power. Biblically it is also often called the "sea," the "great deep," the "water-floods," the "great gulf," as being the ocean of fluidic *aura* surrounding our earth, as a heat-zone is radiated from and surrounds a boiler. And as all rivers discharge themselves into the physical sea, so do all our streams of thought, desire, passion, and impurity empty themselves into that deep, which receives also souls to which the mortal body no longer coheres, and where such, if unfitted to migrate to purer spheres, are magnetically imprisoned pending purification or re-embodiment. It is that "sea" which, despite all cyclic detentions, will at last "give up the dead that are in it" and of which, when it has fulfilled its function, it is written that in the blessed consummation of all things it will itself be dissipated: "There was no more sea."

This brings us to our third reference. This "sea" it is upon which, in the wonderful but so lamentably misunderstood imagery of the Gospels, Jesus is described as walking, and across which His vision-drawn disciple Peter ventured forth from his boat to join Him. No record this of thaumaturgic wonders wrought upon the waters of a Palestinian pond. It voices the same truth as that sought to be expressed by the Greek myth of Icarus, who, as Peter almost did, fell back into the sea over which he essayed to fly, but with wings as yet too weak to bear the sun's heat. High above the sea and hurly-burly of generation ever shines the Sun of Righteousness; upon the waters of that sea Jesus is ever walking—in the sense of transcending and overruling them; as the Psalmist has it, "the Lord sitteth above the water-flood; the Lord remaineth a king for ever." Unpurified, unperfected souls, not yet fitted for that pure sphere, fall back like autumn leaves into the seething flux of generation and re-embodiment. The soul, with its Icarian wings of aspiration,

Mounts, and that hardly, to Eternal Life;

but—*facilis descensus Averni*—it is easy to slip back and become drawn again and again into the whirlpooled waters of generation. Peter nearly succumbed, but despite the smallness of his faith and will they were large enough—he was sufficiently polarised to his Lord—to prevent utter relapse. And we too, like him, may, if we will, leave the boat (or body) of our own building for ever, if, with undistracted gaze upon Him who walks above the flux of generated existence, we march forward in a venture of faith and under the urge of unceasing desire for permanent union with its Overlord and the deliverer from its bondage. I know not what may be the law of life for others, but to me it seems that, for a Christian, to incarnate is to retrogress.

This, terse and summary as it is, is all that can now be said of a theme susceptible of much fuller treatment, as also of various exceptions and qualifications. Of these last, one of the chief would be the possible—

may more, the probable—return to incarnate existence of souls whose regeneration is complete, but who, moved by love and compassion, assume a physical vesture once more for the purpose of helping on their less advanced brethren. Obviously such stand in a class to themselves and are outside the compulsion to which their spiritual juniors are subject. They are miniature Christs, emulating in their own degree the voluntary incarnation of the Universal Regenerator; and to such, having achieved complete mastery of physical laws and conditions, the taking up and putting off a physical body at will would be a task as simple as is to us the changing of our clothes. Post-regeneration capabilities, as our Lord's post-resurrection actions disclose, are of a different and higher order altogether from those open to the unperfected man.

To end, then, where we began, the Christian mystic is concerned with the problem of reincarnation only to the extent of learning how to avoid that calamity. And in so far as his knowledge of that subject is imperfect, as perforce it is, his faith is that in whatsoever state or plane of existence he may be, so long as he preserves within him the seed of Life Eternal, God will give that seed a body as it pleaseth Him; but whether that be a body terrestrial or a body celestial is of no moment to himself. His whole aim is to ally his will and to unify his desire with that Will whose desire is to shape all to a perfect end; in which Will is our only peace. For him who is in conscious conversation with God there is no inquiry, no preference of desire, as to the form his embodiment may hereafter at any time take, or the place to which it may be assigned. For him no form of vesture will be of less consequence or greater value than another so long as it serves His purpose; and to wish it otherwise would be to violate the harmonies of the Cosmic Order. And he would answer as Dante was answered on asking the blessed in one of the lower spheres of Paradise whether they had no wish to pass on to the still more unspeakable bliss and knowledge of the heights above them:

CONTEMPLATIONS

Brother, our love, which naught will take
Save what is given, our thirst to slake,
 Hath aye the power to still
 The impulse of our will.
For higher place if we should yearn,
Our longing would to discord turn
 With His love that hath given
 Our portion here in heaven.
Nay 'tis our very bliss to find
Ourselves by heavenly Will confined,
 Wherethrough in unison
 Is His Will with our own.
Wherefore, when here our seats are laid
Tier above tier, the realm is glad,
 And glad our King, who takes
 Our human wills, and makes
Them His. And His Will is our peace.
It is the sea, whereto of grace
 Moveth His every creature
 And all the work of Nature.